

Division of Customer Relations

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Director

The Division of Customer Relations is involved in the day-to-day handling of customer complaints regarding the services provided by and the related activities of all the utilities regulated by the BPU as well as licensed third party energy suppliers and facility based resellers of telephone service.

(Only the Office of Cable Television, which monitors the activities of an industry not considered to be a “utility”, contains its own complaint investigation unit.)

The Division maintains the BPU's complaint "switchboard", handling matters in verbal, written, or internet format.

This complaint information is gathered and analyzed to identify customer-oriented trends as they develop.

The Division plays an active role in providing customers with consumer protection safeguards in the competitive energy and telephone industry.

Bureau of Customer Relations

- The Bureau of Customer Relations provides the most visible direct communications link between the BPU and the customers of the utilities it regulates as well as licensed third party energy suppliers and resellers of telephone service.
- The Bureau assists customers in resolving service and billing problems.
- The Bureau also participates in investigations and research activities related to emergencies.

- In addition to maintaining local (973-648-2350) and toll free (800-624-0241) telephone numbers, the Bureau maintains an Electronic Data Interchange System, which enables major utilities to receive complaints instantaneously over high-speed data lines.
- Processing time is thus reduced and responses are provided faster.

- The Bureau has seen an increase of 27% in the number of customers assisted since 1996.
- For comparison, the Bureau assisted customers with 10,548 verbal and 3,265 written complaints in the year 1996.
- In the year 2000, the Bureau assisted customers with 14,377 verbal and 4,439 written complaints.
- In addition, the Bureau received 1,649 emails from customers requesting assistance or general information.
- The Bureau received 138,637 telephone inquiries in the year 2000.

- With the implementation of competition in the energy and telephone industry, other BPU Divisions, governmental agencies, State Public Utility Commissions and customers rely on the Bureau to provide information as to how well these companies are serving its customers.
- The Bureau has received inquiries from 952 different companies in which customers had a problem with.

Bureau of Research and Planning

- The Bureau of Research and Planning is responsible for the review of rate cases and mergers, the analysis of complaint information to identify customer-oriented trends as they develop, making analyses of reports and findings related to customer service issues, rulemaking, rule re-adoptions, the investigations of alleged telephone slamming complaints, investigations into the marketing practices of third party energy suppliers and preparation and submission of special projects.

- The Bureau has also levied fines against one telephone company for the unauthorized switching of customers' telephone service as well as two companies which are third party energy suppliers for violations of the Energy Competition Standards.

- The Bureau is also responsible for developing, maintaining and updating the Division's utilities' and companies' essential contact information listings for Division staff, which are updated continuously as companies and utilities operating in New Jersey are ever-changing.
- This Bureau is also responsible for the development and efficiency of our Division's computerized complaint tracking data system for upgrading and expanding existing functions.
- The Customer Assistance Systems, is used by every employee within the Division of Customer Relations.

- An important aspect of this Bureau is preparing special Board Orders which set forth various measures, such as In The Matter of Provision of Assistance to the Families of Victims of the September 11, 2001 Terrorist Attacks and Activated Military Personnel.

- Additionally, this Bureau participates in the development of utility social service programs which assist New Jersey customers, assessing program goals and financial summaries for proper disbursement of funds. This includes programs such as the New Jersey Statewide Heating Assistance and Referral for Energy Services, (NJ SHARES).

Top Ten Constituent Concerns of 2000

- 1) Quality of Service
- 2) Collections
- 3) Billing Problems
- 4) Reseller (Telephone Service)
- 5) Third Party Energy Suppliers

Top Ten Constituent Concerns of 2000

- 6) Slamming (Unauthorized switching of the preferred carrier)
- 7) Service Outages
- 8) Meter Readings
- 9) Marketing and Advertising
- 10) Rates, in general